THE RIVERSIDE CHURCH
RIVERSIDE DRIVE at 122ND STREET
NEW YORK 27, N.Y.

July 19, 1949

Dear Gene:

Mr. Heidt called me to his office this afternoon and acquainted me with the organ-project coming up next week, at which time the console is to be moved into a new position, and, if I understand it rightly, the move will then be under consideration as a permanent set-up. The idea was a surprise to me, though the fact that Virgil had not discussed it with me is not, since we have rather opposite ideas as to such matters.

Perhaps I am crossing a bridge too soon, as I so often do, but it has disturbed me quite a bit to think that such a console position might become permanent. In trying to gather my forces together pro and con, I am afraid that I see little "pro" in the set-up. It would seem to me that the only reason for placing the console in any other position than the present one would be to improve or expedite the use of the console in the church services. The present position, to all intents and purposes, meets these requirements, of morning and afternoon services, better than the new position would. At the very best, an organ console takes up quite a bit of room, and the chancel is already out of balance both in appearance and in usefulness, as far as the choir is concerned. There are four seats at present unusable because of the position in which I have to stand, and these remain vacant even when the organist-director set-up is in effect. The proposed move would take away two more seats, further unbalancing the West side of the choir.

With the organist facing the West wall, away from the choir, it would become next to impossible for an organist-director to function. Our summer substitute finds the problem sufficiently difficult as it is, and to increase the burden seems unreasonable. Then, too, the afternoon oratorios have become increasingly effective with the two of us presenting them together, and the present position of the console would seem to be the most satisfactory position for seeing the director. Virgil may suggest that mirrors can be used to advantage but I can assure you that the most unsatisfactory feature of the whole choir set-up is the mirror problem, which has never been successfully worked out, at Riverside or elsewhere. At best, it is a make-shift. The differance in the way the choir sings in the morning and in the afternoon is largely due to the fact that in the morning, half the choir looks into mirrors, and in the afternoon, all the choir looks directly at the director. Virgil may think that he could follow by looking into a mirror but I find it somewhat of a test to keep the situation under control during an oratorio, when he is looking, supposedly, directly at me. Three seperate afternoons last season, he found it necessary to crouch so far down behind the console, to avoid seeing me because he disagreed with my way of doing the music, that a mirror would be a very simple excuse for not following me.

Much time, thought, and money have gone into the building of Riverside Church. Surely one of the paramount reasons for this was to secure beauty and inspiration, and above all a focal point in a beautiful sanctuary at the front of the Church. To have effective music, a choir and organ console were found to be necessary, but, after accepting this fact, primary consideration was given to making these two features as inconspicious as possible. Surely the enlarging of the console area with a screen, and the further unbalancing of the choir stalls, can not be considered in the above philosophy. If beauty and devotinnal atmosphere have been established, the next question would seem to me to be whether the two main Sunday services were adequately served by the present set-up. Therefore, can the moving of the console be considered either as an improvement architecturally or as an improved method of supplying the music for the worship services? I think the answer is "no"!

What other consideration is there, then? Around this question a number of things could be discussed but I am hardly in a position to express myself too emphatically. I do know this: the congregation is already pretty stirred up about several matters concerning the organ and Virgil, and I don't think it would be helpful, either to Virgil or to the ministers and music committee, to add another controversial matter to the problem. I want Virgil to have a new organ, if that is possible; I want him to be able to "express" himself musically, within limits, just as I desire and need the same for myself. I do not think that he will win more friends for Riverside by being "in sight" while playing recitals, and <u>if</u> more people attend recitals in a church because of seeing the player, then the purpose and function of organ music as a church offering fails, as far as I am concerned, and I have a host of people with the same opinion, and many of them are members of Riverside Church.

I am sending a similar letter to Dr. McCracken, I hope not because of pique at learning of this from Mr. Heidt, but in the hope that my opinion is worth something as a Minister of Music, as a member of the staff active in the worship services of Riverside, and as a member of the congregation.

Most sincerely,